

‘Absolute simplicity, absolute minimalism, absolute honesty’

Abhik Sanyal, Vice President & Head - Consumer Marketing, DSP Mutual Fund shares his points of view on OOH advertising. Edited excerpts of the interview:

By Pray Jani

What is your brand philosophy on communicating through outdoor advertising medium?

If you see our recent campaigns, like the ‘Markets Fluctuate’ campaign and now the ‘Bachao’ campaign, you will see that the message is such that it drives the point home very simply in the minds of our target audience. Earlier, we had tried complicated messaging but recognised the need to change.

We have also tried to use OOH to send reminders to people in the past, and we have also tried giving rational messaging. However, we realised that what drives people more is the simplest form of communication. Hence, our brand philosophy of communication when it comes to outdoor advertising is based on the cornerstones of absolute simplicity, absolute minimalism and the idea of absolute honesty. We don’t want to complicate the communication, we want to be responsible in what we are saying, but we also need to be meaningfully attractive to the people. If we are not attractive, then people will have a completely indifferent reaction to our campaign.

During the tax saving season, for example, there are so many tax saving communications that are out, so why will someone notice our message over others if we just say – invest in tax saving funds. So, we just removed the word “tax” from our message and stuck to minimalism. We believe in converting communication to a simpler form and a very important part of that is removing the clutter. We believe in standing out from the crowd even if that means taking the road less travelled.

To be honest, it is not that difficult to stand out; all you need is the will to be different from what everyone else is doing and for you to be able to sharply identify



Abhik Sanyal, Vice President & Head - Consumer Marketing, DSP Mutual Fund

what the central idea behind the communication to the viewer has to be. That would make your communication very precise.

Tell us something about your recent “Bachao” campaign.

We had earlier tried a three-word campaign with the ‘Axe Your Tax’ campaign. That campaign did not feature names of our products in any way. All it said was “Axe Your Tax” and it gave a URL. So, we have been trying the concept of minimalism for a while, and “Bachao”



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is a simple extension of that idea where we challenged ourselves to make it shorter than three words – to just one word.

Moreover, the 'Axe Your Tax' campaign was meant to push our product, whereas the 'Bachao' campaign is more about educating consumers about our offerings. We felt the need to do this educational campaign because we found a lot of people opting for other tax saving instruments. ELS as a category has a lot of advantages like offering market-linked investment benefits, shortest lock-in period, competitive returns and so on. Rationally, there is a big advantage in buying this product but we thought, let us make it even more simple, perhaps even strike an emotional chord. We thought, let's not give viewers proof-points on why they should consider this category but go straight with the pure benefit, which is saving tax. Hence, the focus on just one word 'Bachao'.

A big consideration for us was that something like this was not done before. If you've seen our creatives, we have not even used any images because frankly, we didn't see a reason for adding elements just for the sake of following the traditional headline-image-copy-CTA template. If we can communicate through just one word and it stands out, there is nothing better. When it all comes together and grabs viewer attention, our job is done. And that is the primary purpose of OOH, in my opinion – to grab attention, meaningfully.

When it comes to media allocation, what are the formats that DSP Mutual Fund prefers?

We don't have a preference in terms of media options. We create a media plan depending on the message we have to give to the audience. The 'Markets Fluctuate' campaign, for example, was meant for a slightly advanced user. Therefore, the media allocation was for a slightly different audience. 'Bachao' is for everyone associated with paying tax and wanting to save. Hence, for this campaign we were looking at everything from large format billboards to frequency building BQS media, to media at corporate business parks. It was relevant to anyone with an income upwards of a certain level, where tax saving would be a relevant need.

We also look at transit media options for our communication. We took up metro train wraps, and

media on buses and trains. We tend to not overuse airport media for mass campaigns. If we were to opt for airport media, we'd keep our messaging more thoughtful and showcase it tactfully, probably with a mix of media, like branding on the baggage conveyor belts, static/ dynamic backlit media, in-flight branding, etc.

Generally, the key is to take clusters. One or two sites here and there don't make an impact so a threshold level of visual coverage is important.

"We believe in standing out from the crowd even if that means taking the road less travelled."

You have had the experience of buying DOOH media through a programmatic platform. What were the key takeaways?

We have tried programmatic digital OOH options, but we have not gone into it in great detail. There are options available today that allow you to display the content depending on the time of day or place or type of customer. Those options are good from a frequency building perspective but slightly difficult from the monitoring perspective, especially at an overall campaign level. Of course, this is getting better and monitoring tools are also getting more organised.

Programmatic DOOH has been in place for a while now, but I see certain apprehension from brands with regard to programmatic platforms. I feel brands need to educate themselves on those channels and see the outcomes for themselves.

The way a campaign is planned and executed via pDOOH is different from the conventional way of advertising. pDOOH provides clearer feedback; and gets you a better sense of the numbers. One is able to change



the campaigns and creatives instantly. Besides, DOOH has minimal production costs and one can experiment, test different messages and find out which message performs better and even change the creatives without incurring additional production costs -- which tends to be a deterrent on traditional media.

One other factor to keep in mind is that when it comes to traditional OOH, one could probably negotiate and get media through the agency or through personal relationships, but when it comes to pDOOH, the media bidding is competitive and not 'relationship dependent'. What is good is that agencies are also beginning to realise that efficiency, tracking and accountability is higher when it comes to pDOOH. But yes for pDOOH (or even DOOH) to work and become mainstream, what is required is a strong network and a massive increase in coverage.

When it comes to advertising, what percentage of your marketing budget goes for OOH?

We have changed the allocation to OOH over the years depending on the objectives. It depends on the kind of messaging, we follow. There are times when more than 60% went to OOH, while there are also times when it was zero. It is not that one sticks to one single channel all the time. When mass media and reach + impact are on our agenda, outdoor becomes a big part of our media mix. The 'Markets Fluctuate' was a pure OOH campaign while 'Axe Your Tax' was 80% OOH, 20% digital in terms of budget allocation.

I am not of the belief that online media is always superior to traditional formats in delivering impact. Different media options have a different purposes for brands. There is a story-telling format that TV provides, there is the ability to track and monitor that makes digital media effective and there is big impact that can be created when a brand uses OOH effectively.

In my opinion, traditional media like large billboards and now newer digital OOH formats are here to stay. There is a reason why online brands like Amazon, Google or Netflix run large scale campaigns on OOH.

You have been using outdoor extensively in recent years. What challenges have you faced while launching your OOH campaigns?

Fragmented media ownership poses a big challenge. It is bit of a black box eventually, especially when you are doing a big campaign. When it comes to small campaigns, it is easier to monitor; it is easier to locate the media owners and you know what kind of a deal can be expected from a smaller set of media owners. But when a big campaign is to be executed with a budget of Rs 3-5 crore, targeting thousands of touchpoints, how can a brand be sure that all or most of those touchpoints are properly targeted? Monitoring systems are agency specific and there is always a problem of believability in terms of campaign tracking and effectiveness monitoring. This is especially true when it comes to innovations.

When it comes to print, we know the costs exactly. In OOH, there is generally no transparent rate-card. One agency could give you a site for Rs 10 lakh while another would give the same site for Rs 5 lakh. When one approaches media owners directly, the rates can be higher or lower than when one goes through an agency. Also, while some agencies are good at large format media and therefore evangelise only those formats, others may be good with digital OOH. So, how does one institutionalise a transparent rate-card or bidding system in the OOH industry?

Outdoor is constantly growing and newer media are coming into the market (like cab top media, 'bike' media and what not); some work needs to be done in that direction as well. How effectively can OOH work in tandem with activation?

And finally, the problem of high production costs remains. DOOH solves that issue in a way, but how do brands change creatives when it comes to longer-term OOH plans, without the need to incur big costs for creative refreshes?

What changes do you anticipate in the OOH industry in the coming times?

I believe OOH will increasingly go the digital way in the coming years. Perhaps more and more OOH agencies will need in-house digital expertise-- such that they can evangelise a mix of both those mediums. The efficiency and accountability through this combination will be very high, and will also enable brands to track every single campaign smartly.●



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A Time To Reflect & **REGROUP**

Bhawana Anand & Pray Jani reached out to the heads of India's leading specialist agencies to ascertain the key issues to be addressed in the wake of the Covid-19 induced business downturn

The Indian OOH industry that had been weighed down by sluggishness across the national economic landscape in the latter half of 2019 is now caught in a bind in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic that brought the nation to a standstill. In a season that usually sees vibrant OOH campaigns as a new financial year gets underway and the preparations for the summer holidays begin, the pandemic and the lockdown have applied the brakes on business in a manner never seen before.

The grim situation seems to have clamped down every bit of optimism that decision makers would have wanted to lean on. Yet, there is a collective viewpoint being made that this period could be utilised by the industry to plan afresh, think up new strategies, and capitalise on a turnaround that is likely to happen a few months down the line. A summary of the key assertions of top decision makers of India's leading specialist agencies have been captured in this article. Read on.

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‘We expect a turnaround for the industry by Sept’

Rachana Lokhande, Co-CEO, Kinetic India asserts that advertising brands will come back to OOH

“An enormous number of campaigns had been cancelled for the months of March and April. We recommended to our clients to do so as it wouldn't have been a wise decision to execute the plans at a time when the entire globe was in a lockdown situation. We are supporting our clients in re-scheduling and modifying their plans and strategies.”




“There is a lot of uncertainty around us. Hence, it is too soon to predict the damage that will befall the Indian OOH industry. Usually, the months of March, April and May are crucial for the trade as the months that follow have the monsoons that are very unfavourable for the outdoor business. Currently, we are expecting a fresh start from September.”

“Advertising brands will continue to spend on OOH post the recovery. Currently, it is not just medium, but other mainline channels like TV are also facing the heat as although people are sitting at home, they don't necessarily watch TV all the time.”

“As an agency, we are analysing the situation, while keeping in view that the trade is interlinked with our partners and clients. This is not the right time to make pitches or make new strategies as we don't know how business will unfold once we are back to regular routines. Let's wait and watch.”

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‘The course of business will be very different going forward’

Fabian Cowan, President, Posterscope India sees merit in using the current period to gear up for the changing times



"The future is not googleable, at least not yet, so predicting how long this situation will continue is anybody's guess. Brand campaigns will come out of the proverbial closet once people are back on the streets and into their offices, going about their normal lives. We can only hope that normalcy returns sooner than later. We have come to terms with the reality and have started preparing ourselves for what will come to be the new normal. Some events have the power to change the course of history, we believe this is one of them. The course of business will be very different going forward and we understand that using this period to gear up for those changing times is the key to future success. We are using this lockdown to open up new approaches."

‘Cost control will be a critical component of the revival plan’

Atul Shrivastava, Group CEO, Laqshya Media Group says the strategies for business recovery will be actioned as soon as normal working conditions return



"The cutback on brand campaigns is definitely temporary. Things will become normal within 30 days of Covid-19 threat coming under control. Let's hope that there is no need for the lockdown to be extended beyond April 14. The extent of the damage on business will be known only after the virus has been exterminated."

"Control and containing of costs are critical for absorbing the business shocks. On the business front, we will action our strategies once normal working resumes. Various plans are being discussed and evaluated internally with the business heads and the teams."



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‘We’ll need to curate creative OOH/DOOH solutions’

Jayesh Yagnik, CEO, MOMS Outdoor Media Solutions believes the true potentials of OOH could be fully leveraged when business returns to normality



We have been blessed with collaborative client partners. Earlier, we were looking to take big strides from April 1, but following the lockdown we don’t see a definite date by which the brand campaigns will be launched. Optimistically and realistically, the lockdown will likely apply the brakes on business across the months of April and May. I do hope that the pandemic will be controlled sooner than later. While I believe the campaigns will begin as soon as normality returns, the monsoon season will not be a promising time for the industry. Having said that, considering a lean Q1 that we would have had, the monsoon season may not be all that dull for the OOH industry. With IPL almost getting cancelled and Olympics already getting postponed to next year, brands would look for an alternate media to reach the target audiences. We all know that OOH is second most reached media

after TV and with big sporting events either cancelled or postponed there is a huge opportunity for the OOH industry to capitalise on. We shall have to be on our toes and curate creative OOH/DOOH solutions as well as plan heavy use of transit media and ambient destinations to work out campaigns in the monsoon season.

“As of now, we along with all our peers in the industry, will have to bear the brunt of the pandemic and business shocks. However, I would like to add that Madison has been conservatively managed for the last 32 years and it is this philosophy that holds us in good stead in tough times like these. Over the years, we have been through many ups and down and have come out from most downturns with flying colours and I am sure, will we from this one, too.”

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‘In such situations, cash is king’

Abhijeet Sengupta, CEO, OAP India says the agency plans on an R&D project that is temporarily kept on hold



“A lot of brands have dropped their existing campaigns due to the lockdown. The long-term campaigns have been put on hold while the upcoming ones are delayed. The duration of this cut-back will only depend on the duration of the lockdown; on how long the people will remain confined to their houses. We are in talks with some brands who have given their brief for the campaigns assigned for the month of May but we cannot be certain about that as well. In these situations, cash is king, and if we preserve on a personal level then I believe we can sustain. As the campaigns get dropped there are financial difficulties but we do not believe in reducing salary and so we have decided that we will just withhold a proportion of their salary until the situation normalises. We were also going to invest big on our R&D project but due to this lockdown, that too is on hold.”

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‘We’re watching the trends closely to prepare for the bounce-back’

Dipankar Sanyal, CEO, Platinum India says that having clients from a wider spectrum of industries is an advantage



"In terms of business, I don't think March was a big a hit as a few campaigns were executed till 14-15 of the month, after which we voluntarily stopped as the market had started to get hit. So, the last month was saved somehow. Definitely, April looks weak because top 30 cities that contribute 80%-90% of the revenues are completely shut and that has made the business drop to zero. I see a silver lining for Platinum India. As an agency we don't depend on any particular category or instead have a bouquet of clients from all sectors including OTT, FMCG, automobiles and mobile handsets, so if not all, at least some categories that are little less hit will start spending soon. I am hopeful that things will look up soon. As an agency our strategy is to keep a close watch on different industries and their status during this period of pandemic so that we are aware of the

sectors that are likely to come back right after this situation."

"Also, Platinum Media has an entrepreneurial approach whereby right from the ground level to the high level we know the cost saving mechanism. The higher management has been discussing this over calls all this while. The situation is grim but I am hoping that something good will come right after this."

‘A time to reduce a lot of mediocracy in the industry’

Mandeep Malhotra, Founding Partner & CEO, The Social Street points out that the agency is making the effort to safeguard the business by planning smarter initiatives



"OOH is definitely seeing a pullback on spends. We had almost Rs 20cr worth of signed POs and business that have been pulled out within a matter of a fortnight. This will impact the industry for another six months or so, depending on how soon the COVID-19 spread can be contained. But we're hopeful to emerge stronger once we are all safely out of the quarantine phase. I am constantly in touch with my leadership team to reengineer the business. We are proactively making efforts to manage and safeguard the business by reducing expenses, planning smarter initiatives, etc. in order to try and remain well positioned through these challenging times. There is a lot of market uncertainty at the moment, clients are shying away from discretionary expenses. OOH is being seen with that filter. Although, I strongly feel it is the right time to invest and

not retract. Seeing it from a slightly different perspective, this will reduce a lot of mediocracy in the business."





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‘Govt needs to spend more on outdoor & waive off license fee’

Amit Kapoor, Director, US Advertising cites the imperative of protecting the interests of vendors, partners and employees



“There were quite a few campaigns in the pipeline which were about to get executed during mid-March. However, the sudden pandemic has paused every marketing campaign, from both government and private organisations. Naturally, brands wouldn’t want to spend on OOH until people re-start their regular schedules.”

“I feel this year is quite awful for the OOH industry. The growth could be nil. Our aim is to protect our partners and vendors during this situation by ensuring that their payments are made on time. We have a duty towards our employees, making sure that they are not affected financially.”

“Moreover, the government needs to support the industry by spending more on outdoor advertising and by waiving off the license fee for media owners.”

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‘Business is likely to pick up in the festive season’

Sanjay Shukla, COO, MAX — OOH, Retail & Experiential says the priority is on achieving a breakeven and safeguarding the interests of the staff



“The current business situation is quite grim, impacting the industry in the short run. In the coming months, brands will be occupied with managing the fallout of the current crisis, so the first quarter will likely be a washout. There are trends pointing to a recession setting in which will also impact OOH in the coming times. However, I expect OOH business to pick up around September-October during the festive season when brands will be inclined to up their spends.”

“As an OOH company, we will definitely have to revise our forecasts made in the month of February and re-strategise accordingly. Our foremost priority is to safeguard our staff and people as there will be no laid offs from our end. Secondly, our effort will be to achieve the breakeven point in P&L. Since Mudra Max has various other wings such as rural marketing, activation and experiential, we definitely hope to meet the breakeven.”

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When The Going Gets Tough

India's leading OOH media owners voice their viewpoints on the steps to be taken to forestall the negative fallout of the Covid-19 induced economic crisis that has brought the business to a grinding halt. **Bhawana Anand & Pray Jani** present the key takeaways from the conversations with the industry captains

'We need to look beyond the immediate challenges'

Aman Nanda, Chief Strategy Officer, Times OOH asserts that the industry should have to come up with a long term plan to deal with the fallout of an economic crisis that's brewing



"The coronavirus pandemic is a global humanitarian challenge. In these circumstances, it is not enough to be just focusing on the issue of reducing media occupancy. There are challenges confronting all media classes, be it print, radio, TV or OOH. For the OOH industry, the work from home advisory from the government and the complete lockdown hit hard the business.

"This pandemic has set in motion an economic crisis that will be felt for some years to come. So, it's time for us to be well prepared for the future instead of just analysing the current crisis from business point of view. Currently, we are addressing the immediate challenges that meet our employees and partners. At the same time, it is imperative for us to build

a detailed plan to be actioned when the business environment becomes normal, especially since the pattern of consumer spends and corporate budgets will have changed in the coming months.

"In the last one month, we at Times OOH have seen campaign postponement and cancellations, and drying up of the pipeline. As discretionary spends go down, clients will be cautious with regard to advertising spends, the media mix to be employed, etc. In general, advertisers are likely to re-evaluate their marketing spends.

"In any case, we don't want to compromise our operational quality and efficiency. As the industry evolves, we will keep investing on state-of-the-art media. To mitigate the current impact, we are looking for support from the authorities in terms of license fee waiver, lenient credit period, etc." •

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'We need to extend every support to our clients in this period'

H V Surendra Nath, COO, Prakash Arts says that license fee waivers are most needed for the industry to stay afloat



"The entire lockdown happened all of a sudden which didn't give us any time to work out a strategy. Moreover,

our business depends on how other industries perform. It is when there are new launches, retail expansions and new product and services in the market that there would be greater demand for advertising.

"We need to extend every support to our clients in this period, and gain their confidence by providing good pricing deals and high quality media. If the MNCs don't spend, we would be depending a lot more on the regional and local advertisers who anyway contribute significantly to the OOH revenues.

"We are seeking a degree of relaxation on license fee payment to the authorities including those for airports and railways. License fees constitute a large part of our payouts. If we do not get a relief on this count, our business health will be seriously undermined."

'The crisis has shaken up business & consumer behaviour'

Gautam Bhirani, Founder & MD, EyeTalk Media Ventures says that cutting operational expenses and staying positive is the need of the hour for every organization



"A blanket lockdown of the nation amidst the coronavirus pandemic has meant a total turn off for our DOOH assets. The situation changed within a fortnight and we have lost both revenue and momentum,

especially when things were about to pick-up with the much-awaited Indian Premier League around the corner and the financial year ending.

"The coronavirus crisis has shaken up business and consumer behaviour on a massive scale. All new campaign bookings have been terminated, accounting to a loss of US\$1.2mn (about Rs 9.17 cr). Additionally, with long-term deals kept on hold, these are unprecedented times for the industry as a whole. With #socialdistancing, #workfromhome and #donotgooutofhome trending today, there are going to be no advertising spends on OOH till normalcy is restored. "Cutting operational expenses and staying positive is the need of the hour for every organisation today. We are utilising this time optimally to incorporate new features to our technology and working towards enhancing the EyeTalk Media Ventures experience for both- audiences and advertisers."



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'We must go the extra mile to reinforce client confidence in OOH'

S Kumar, Managing Director, Srishti Group opines that brands would do well to plan attractive creatives and come out with positive messages post the lockdown



"These are times when we must go the extra mile to reinforce the confidence of the advertising clients in OOH. One way would be to give a free run for the campaigns that had been cut short or postponed, once business returns to normality."

"I believe once the lockdown is over, people will come out in big numbers and that would be a great time for the advertising brands to grab consumer attention. Brands would do well to plan attractive creatives and also come out with positive messages."

"When it comes to the demand for license fee waivers and other relaxations, our industry should be making a collective representation to the highest authorities. Individual initiatives on this count could be confusing to some of the government departments."

"For the traditional media owners, the reverse migration of labour might prove to be a challenge in the immediate run. Of course, that may not be a challenge for the DOOH media operators though."

'Industry needs govt support in this hour of crisis'

Shavinder Singh Sandhu, Director, LeafBerry says it is a Force Majeure situation and government bodies need to extend due support to the media operators



"This is a disastrous situation for the OOH industry. The lockdown has defeated the very essence of OOH. When no one is allowed out of home, who would be seeing your ads. Hence, the clients have rightly cancelled their campaigns. We absolutely understand the clients' standpoint and we support them by not seeking payment for this period."

"This is a case of Force Majeure, and we seek due support from the government. After all, we are partnering government bodies and we are paying assured revenues on the inventory. Government should not be charging any fee on our media in this time of crisis."





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'Transit media will get going as soon as passenger traffic picks up'

Shashi Chaudhary, President, FAMO & Director, Century Group of Companies informs that the AAI has been approached for licensee fee waiver that brands would do well to plan attractive creatives and come out with positive messages post the lockdown



"A big challenge has hit our country. The lockdown has drastically impacted OOH. Today, we are faced with cumulative Rs 3cr-5cr losses in just two months.

"To bring back advertisers to OOH, we will have to extend good discounted deals. In the case of transit media, the advertisers will come back as soon as the passenger traffic picks up.

"FAMO (Federation of Airport Media Owners) has approached the Airport Authority of India seeking a waiver on the license fee payable to the authority by the FAMO members over the next few months. We are expecting a favourable response from AAI."

'The industry will bounce back'

Pranay Shah, Director, Khushi Advertising is hopeful of an early recovery from the business downslide



"While the government is taking all required measures for our safety, our industry will bear the brunt of the impact of Covid-19 in the first quarter. With airports, malls and cinemas shut in the wake of the government enforcement of the lockdown, clients have called off their campaigns. However, I believe that as normalcy returns, India will see a good recovery and the entire industry will bounce back.

"India is a positive story and one of the most preferred and attractive destinations for all multinational companies. We will be able to tide over the current crisis if all safety instructions are duly followed."





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'Our attention will be on making our media more intelligent'

Icy Varghese, MD, PlayAds & Lijoy Johny, Director Sales, PlayAds underline the importance of investing in technology to make the media all the more appealing to advertisers



Icy Varghese, MD, PlayAds

"Like every other industry, OOH including transit media is seeing unprecedented setbacks. The revenue inflow has almost come to a standstill. Apparently, this situation will continue until we get past this pandemic.

It is also to be assumed that it will take at least six months for OOH to see brand-spends. The immediate focus of brands would be to revive their mainstream activities by mitigating their costs as much as possible and for this reason their ad spends may go down. During this period, it is imperative that we plan our resource allocations most efficiently, and focus on activities that add value to our customers.

"We see light at the end of the tunnel. At some point of time, spends will pick up as the economy regains momentum. Brands will have to depend on outdoor advertising in order to retain/reclaim their market share. Therefore, it becomes all the more important to stay put and display a fair bit of perseverance until a new dawn arrives. PlayAds will make further capital investments as the market gains traction. And we will maintain our focus on technology to add more value to our offerings. We will continue to make our displays more intelligent and interactive."

'Post lockdown business recovery will be gradual'

Anup Mittal, Partner, Mittal Sons Media Associates cites the particular challenges that confront mall media business



"The malls are shut now and with it, so are the campaigns. Even the existing ones have had to be dropped as most of them were about an offer for a specific period and hence they will not even run later. We will have to approach clients again after the lockdown is lifted. Right now, none of the brands are in a position to talk about advertising. And even after the lockdown is lifted, we cannot be sure as to how the malls will perform but we are keeping our hopes alive. "We have discussed with the mall owners and we do not have to pay them during the lockdown. Naturally that makes sense since we cannot get advertisers even if we wanted to."

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'The situation is highly fluid'

Raghu Khanna, Founder & CEO, CashUrDrive wistfully looks at the opportunities lost in these months



"This pandemic has got the business on pause mode where all campaigns have been cancelled or delayed for an indefinite time. People are not on roads, so marketers don't see a point in spending on OOH. Transit media business is facing the same heat like traditional OOH business. It is the time of some big-ticket events such as IPL for which all teams spend considerable budgets on advertising. Moreover, it is hard to predict how brands would react after this pandemic.

"We have been seeking support from our partners such as Uber but the talks are in nascent stage where we are yet to decide what best can be done to handle this situation and come out of it successfully."

'We need collective action to obtain govt support'

Sunil Maheshwari, MD, Maheshwari Advertising calls for national level industry initiatives to prevail upon the government bodies to extend license fee waivers to the media operators



"This kind of a situation is beyond imagination and it is difficult to come up with a business strategy which we think would work. Since we can't predict about clients and their spends, the maximum that we can do is to seek some relief from the authority. I think a national industry federation should approach authorities like the PMO and Central ministries with the request for waiver of license fee that amounts to 70%-80% of our payouts.

"Also, in the given situation, brands will think about first paying salaries to their employees. Advertising will begin only when their production or manufacturing processes and they are ready with new launches and promotions."





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'Media occupancy is a steep challenge today'

Yogesh Lakhani, CMD, Bright Outdoor Media says every effort will be made to bring clients back to OOH



"The pandemic and the lockdown have brought OOH business to a halt. Media occupancy is a big challenge for the industry at this stage, but it is hoped that our nation will successfully overcome the crisis sooner than later. Post that we will work with our clients to reschedule the campaigns in consonance with the budgets available.

"As of now they haven't made any progress on this count, but we are hopeful of making the right steps in the coming weeks and months."

'We're actively engaged in the fight against the virus'

Rajesh Kumar Madhavan, Partner, Chitra Painters adds that on the business front discount deals will be necessary to keep clients engaged



"We at Chitra Painters are trying to figure out what to do right now, since a lot of campaigns have been cancelled. Our regular clients are asking for discount, and we are giving our sites at a lower cost on assurance of cash flow. Kerala is an NRI state and a lot of people

flew in from abroad; increasing the threat. The OOH association in Kerala is focused on curbing the virus spread right now and we have joined hands with various organisations to provide safety measures. Before the lockdown we had placed water and soap at every important junction where people travelling by bus could wash their hands before and after their journey. The people of Kerala have learnt from the Nipah virus incident and they know what precautions to take and they are following them diligently.

"In Kerala, there are very few government sites while 90% are private sites. The entire state has only about 500-600 government sites and so campaigns are only running on those sites. So far there is no support from the government to the outdoor industry but we have asked for some assistance. We are waiting for their response on that."



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'Challenges galore for the business'

Navneet Singh Dhingra, CEO, Orango Solutions points out that the whole year had been a difficult period for the industry



"We don't see any solution to this problem except to try and outlive it. We are waiting for the lockdown to be lifted and figure out a way to hear from our clients. This has anyway been a slow year for the industry and the future also does not look very bright from the outdoor standpoint."

"The AAI has not given a rebate for this period. We have requested to waive off the fee for a certain period but they have not commented on that. In fact, we are still to receive a reply from them on an earlier issue where we had asked them to waive off the fee, either partially or completely."

'This would've been the peak season for some of the advertisers'

Rahul Kadam, Proprietor, Marquis Advertising & Marketing says that the lockdown was nonetheless enforced at the right time



is a lot of uncertainty on how long the OOH industry will take to recover after this lockdown. We do know that FMCG and consumer durables brands would desperately want to come to the outdoors because it is their season. But if the lockdown gets extended to May or even a little beyond that, those brands will not be on OOH for the whole year. So far, we have had inquiries from brand categories like banking, automobiles, and tyres to advertise in the month of May.

"The corporation, AAI or the landlords also have not been responding to the request for waiver of license fee. I believe we can survive this and the lockdown was initiated at the right time. If we would have delayed it by a week or even a few days, the lockdown would have had to be longer than 3 weeks to about 2 months. In that scenario, the outdoor industry would have suffered much more."

"Due to the lockdown, campaigns are either dropped or have been postponed in Pune. The long-term campaigns will resume after the lockdown is over. We have not charged our clients for these 21 days. However, there



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'The period of uncertainty might last months'

K D Maheshwari, Proprietor, NS Publicity is hopeful of govt extending some relief to the industry



"OOH is suffering right now, and I believe the lockdown could be extended and the issue could last for about three months. A lot of seasonal campaigns are expected in this period and we will miss out on them entirely. It is going to take months to get back the clients to advertise, and even then we will not be sure about the proportion of their budget going for outdoor advertising."

"We have appealed to the government for some assistance and waiver of the license fee and we are expecting some kind of relief."

'Pharma brands could increase their OOH presence'

Anoop Khanna, Director, Fast Track Integrated Marketing Service says the Covid-19 crisis happened just as business was picking up



2020. But those expectations were belied in the face of the CAA protests.

"Honda started its campaign for the first time here, and they had taken the airport media, but were forced to drop it due to the lockdown. There were enquires from cement companies for railway media. The season was picking up right before the lockdown was announced but now we are just trying to stay afloat."

"The coming days would be the right time for brands like Cipla and Mankind and other pharmaceutical companies to appear in the outdoor. We had also planned an awareness campaign on Shatabdi train, which is a morning train, but due to the lockdown that too had to be dropped."

"It has been a difficult situation in Assam, starting from CAA protests, and now the lockdown. 2019-20 was supposed to have been a good year for us as we were expecting great outcomes the Khelo India Youth Games

"FAMO has requested for a 4-5-month waiver of fees from AAI. In the agreements there is a 'force majeure' section that relates to aid during unforeseeable circumstances."





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'Insurance, healthcare brands could become active on OOH canvas'

Shaishiv Mehta, Director, Chitra (B) Publicity cites the sudden brakes applied on OOH business



"Mall branding and outdoor campaigns have all been cancelled. We were expecting campaigns of new movie releases, airlines, among other. But they have all been dropped until April 15. It is going to a difficult period over the next few months but we expect some insurance and healthcare brands to come to OOH soon."

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